

## **Sports and Games: A Key Dimension of Integrated Development for Holistic Education**

**Tomy K Kallarakal** is presently working as Professor in Department of Tourism Studies at Christ University, Bangalore. He completed his PhD from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala.

### **Abstract**

Sports and games as a vital component of social and cultural life are embedded in the Indian heritage. They had been seen as an intrinsic component of education and holistic development of human personality. Enabling the youth of today to graduate with a sound mind in a sound body should be the aim of holistic development in higher education institutions. The vital role played by sports and games in the development of an individual and the need to integrate the same into the academic framework of educational institutions should be realized by educators and educational administrators. Students actively engaged in sports and games face challenges of internal nature including their personal involvement in academic oriented activities, class attendance, time constraints, personal goals and career choices, physical and emotional fatigue, transition to college environment and academic performance, institutional policies, expectations from parents and marginalization from mainstream campus activities. This article highlights that Higher Education Institutions should strive to realize the holistic and integrated development of students. Integral formation involves complete and solid formation of every aspect of student's personality, to form an essential component of fundamental and distinctive educational philosophy. Its goal is to nurture them to be intellectually competent, spiritually mature, morally upright, psychologically integrated, physically healthy and socially acceptable. In the changing context of student life and educational scenario, emphasis of sports and games should form an essential aspect of holistic development through integral formation. Policy makers and administrators of higher education need to essentially create an environment integrating sports and games into college wide activities.

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**Keywords:** Sports, Games, Holistic Development, Integrated Development.

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Be strong my young friends, that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the Gita.<sup>1</sup> Every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport, which are essential for the full development of his personality. The freedom to develop physical, intellectual and moral powers through physical education and sport must be guaranteed both within the educational system and in other aspects of social life.<sup>2</sup>

Does this charter hold well in the context of higher education and other aspects of social life in India? This article is an attempt to find an answer to this question and also to highlight the flaws in the thought process of administrators and policy makers of higher education in India.

<sup>1</sup> *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, p.242 9th Edition, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, UNESCO 1978.

## **Human Excellence through Holistic Development**

The essence of human excellence is sound mind in a sound body. This concept must inspire not only our youths, but also the people who are affecting the lives of the youth of our country - the parents, the teachers, the educational institutions and all those who are involved in trying to promote the quality of life of the youth in our country. This kind of inspiration is all the more necessary for people engaged in higher education so that on entering a college or university, our youth will learn the need and technique of seeking excellence in different fields according to their capacity.

When the leaders of a nation talk about excellence among their youth, what do they have in mind? Is it some islands of excellence that they need? If so we have enough of that in our country. Is it not the multifaceted excellence that goes to make a nation great? Has our country achieved this multifaceted excellence? If not, who should take the blame for it? Is it not yet time that we concentrate on the intellectual, social, physical, mental, artistic and religious excellence of the youth of our country?

When a nation talks about human excellence, it should keep in mind the growth model. The human excellence that a nation envisages should enable the students of that nation to grow not only physically but also intellectually and spiritually. The market driven education system of today concentrates only on the intellectual development and in that process feels it convenient to forget the other two more important aspects namely physical development and spiritual development. As a result of this we churn out students who may be intellectually competent but who do not necessarily succeed when confronted with the hard realities of real life.

## **Holistic Education**

Human excellence alone may not result in integrated development. It also requires an element of holistic education which should be seen as a developmental model. This model should help a student to develop his personal, interpersonal and societal skills. The 17 to 19 years of formal education that a student goes through in his/her educational career may take care of the intellectual skills of the student. But, during this process of concentrating on the intellectual skills, the real skills which takes care of the overall (holistic) development of an individual, namely the personal, interpersonal and societal skills are often conveniently forgotten. Both of these, namely, human excellence and holistic education together lead to the concept of integrated development. Therefore in the process of imparting higher education, human excellence components and holistic education components should be nurtured harmoniously. Issues relating to intellectual competence, spiritual maturity, moral uprightness, psychological integration, social acceptance and physical health should be addressed while dealing with youth education.

Physical development especially sports and games for some reasons are getting sidelined in the educational institutions today. The urge to excel academically coupled

with the lack of sufficient infrastructure forces the educational institutions and also the parents to sideline the physical development of their children in terms of sports and games. Hence what should be done? Our Higher Education Institutions are concerned merely with acquisition of knowledge and learning different skills. UNESCO's report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, talks about the four important pillars which educational institutions should cater to. Institutions should cater to structured Knowledge (learning to know) - the first pillar. Institutions should look at skills and make students act creatively (learning to do) - second pillar. Third pillar talks about self development and personal competence (learning to be). The Fourth pillar is about learning to live together. But a Fifth pillar needs to be acknowledged - physical development, which is the need of the hour. Many higher education institutions in the country have been granted the autonomy to design their own programmes and course curriculum. The new courses developed very rarely take into account the competitive factors. Institutions should follow a proactive thinking process while revamping courses. It should make the students strong physically, mentally and spiritually

### **Problems faced**

Review of various literature show that the relationship between intercollegiate sports and academic pursuits in Colleges and Universities continues to arouse simultaneous by both passionate approval and disapproval by scholars.<sup>3</sup> "Academic values and athletic ones can be mutually reinforcing" and hence intercollegiate athletics should be utilized to teach fundamental human values rather than disparaged.<sup>4</sup> A student in order to learn, s/he must invest time and energy into the pursuit of learning (Astin's Student Involvement Theory SIT 1984)

The academic success of any student should not be gauged merely by the grade that he/she scores in the examinations, but it should be tied to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that a student invests in the overall college experience. The focus for institutions should therefore be to create a campus atmosphere that deliberately incorporates the student athletes in the institutional academic culture with a view of producing a graduate who would make a positive impact on society after graduation.<sup>5</sup>

Many educational institutions in the initial years lay great emphasis on the training and development of the athletes and sports persons in their campuses who in turn can bring name and fame to the institution which the institution may not be able to achieve

<sup>3</sup> E Comeaux, CK Harrison, "Faculty and male student athletes: racial differences in the environmental predictors of academic achievement" in *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 10, (2007), 2, 199-214.

<sup>4</sup> RL Simon, "Does athletics undermine academics? Examining some issues" in *Journal Issues Intercollegiate Athletics*, 2, (2008), 40-58.

<sup>5</sup> DA Hyland, "Paidia and Paideia: The Educational Power of Athletics" in *Journal Intercollegiate Sport*, 1, (2008), 66-71.

in the academic front. But as years go by and the institution comes in the fore front of academic performance too, the importance given to the athletes and the sports persons in the campus start diminishing. As college administrators and faculty members work to enhance persistence and graduation rates of their respective institutions, the career of student athletes need to be addressed given their unique role on campus.<sup>6</sup>

Literature on student athletes and their academic performance is contradictory.<sup>7</sup> Student engagement, which is critical for academic success "is a function of both the individual effort of each student and institutional practices and policies that encourage students to participate in purposeful activities".<sup>8</sup> The factors affecting sports performance in educational institutions can be grouped into two, namely, internal (individual/personal) and external (institutional). According to an article written by Njororai Wycliffe W.Simiyu,<sup>9</sup> on "Individual and Institutional Challenges facing student athletes on U.S. College campuses", there are both internal and external factors which affect student athlete performance in campus.

### **Internal factors**

The first main internal factor is time constraint. Educational learning involvement entails attending classes, interacting with faculty, doing research, engaging in group discussions, library work, and participation in student activities.<sup>10</sup> Extreme devotion to sport can potentially eat into the time meant for academics.<sup>11</sup> Student athletes concentration on sports is so encompassing that academics, assignments and class attendance become secondary. What could be the solution to this dilemma? Parents, teachers and coaches should constantly guide the athletic students to balance their athletic and academic commitments, which very often is a difficult task for every one concerned. In the Indian context very often it is the parents who take charge of the academic pursuits of their children. But this scene should change and the parents and teachers should equip the athletic students to take charge of their own academic responsibilities and enlighten them about the importance of taking up this responsibility if they have to succeed.

<sup>6</sup> R Hyatt, "Barriers to persistence among African American Intercollegiate Athletes: A Literature Review of non-cognitive variables", *College Student Journal*, 37, (2003), 2, 260.

<sup>7</sup> E Aries, D McCarthy, P Salovey, MR Banaji, "A comparison of athletes and non- athletes at highly selective colleges: Academic performance and personal development" in *Higher Education*, 45, (2004), 6, 577-602; AW Astin, Student involvement: A development theory for higher education in *College Student Journal*, 25, (1984), 4, 297-308; AW Astin, Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education in *College Student Journal*, 40, (1999), 5, 518-529; WG Bowen, SA Levin, *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Value*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> PD Umbach, MM Plamer, GD Kuh, SJ Hannah, Intercollegiate athletes and effective educational practices: Winning combination or losing effort? *Res. Higher Educ.*, 47(6), 2006, pp. 709-733.

<sup>9</sup> W Njororai Wycliffe Simiyu, "Individual and institutional challenges facing student athletes on U.S. college campuses" in *Journal of Physical Education and Sports Management*, 1, (2010), 2, 16-24.

<sup>10</sup> E Pascarella, PT Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> TB Fletcher, JM Benshoff, MJ Richburg, *A systems approach to understanding and counseling college student-athletes*, *College Counsel journal*, Spring (2003), 6, 35-45.

The second internal factor is career goals. Education is not a student athletes' primary reason for attending college. According to the study done by Comeaux and Harrison, there are two important findings that shed light on the student athlete and academic success in colleges. Firstly, student athletes who were encouraged to attend regular classes by faculty tend to get higher grade point averages (GPA). This calls for regular faculty student athlete interaction and athletes if left to the care of only coaches may not be academically challenged beyond the playing field. Secondly those athletic students who are provided assistance in achieving professional goals by their instructors tend to perform better academically in college.

The third internal factor is the newcomer experience once they enter the college campuses. There are three variables which may impact first year emotional distress - social (parental influences, social adjustment); personal; (emotional adjustment, coping style) and attachment to the institution.<sup>12</sup> Most student athletes are big stars on their high school campuses by the time they reach their senior year. They therefore have over the years earned recognition, positive feedback by peers, faculty and the whole high school community. However, once they enter college, they have to start from scratch academically, socially and even on the athletics team. The loss of recognition, favors and personalized attention predisposes the student athlete to the feeling of abandonment and erosion of the sense of importance that one is used to. This initial dilemma that they face once they enter colleges can put many of them on a path which may not be very comfortable for them for the rest of their campus life.

The last internal factor is the physical and emotional strain that the student athlete goes through while in the campus. The cumulative physical toll throughout the academic year can potentially wreak havoc on a student athlete's ability to concentrate on studies.<sup>13</sup> Apart from the physical demands, the emotional highs and lows associated with competition outcomes can leave an individual athlete in a state of burn out. This fatigue translates to failure to do assignments, dose off in class, miss class to recuperate in bed, poor concentration and mental lapses. Research findings show that student athletes' classroom performance is lower compared to the out of season performance.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> WE Martin Jr., JL Swart-Kulstad, M Madison, *Psychological factors that predict the college adjustment of first- year undergraduate students: Implications for college counselors*, *College Counsel journal*, 2, (1999), 2, 121-134.

<sup>13</sup> E Thomas, "A College perspective on academics and the student athlete", *Coach & Athletics Director*, March, 77, (2008), 8, 29-36.

<sup>14</sup> BM Scott, TS Paskus, M Miranda, TA Petr, McArdle, "In-season vs. out-of- season academic performance of college student athletes" in *Intercollegiate sports journal*, 1, (2008), 202-226.

## External factors

The first external factor that affects a student athlete is the demands of the coach. Coaches tend to have a firm grip on student athletes as they determine the student scholarship as well as team roles.<sup>15</sup> Student athletes are therefore given mixed signals when team priorities are set and academic studies are put second to practices and competitions. This lack of clarity arises from the publicly proclaimed institutional priorities of academics coming first and athletics second.

The second external factor is the policies of the institution. Student athletes frequently miss classes in order to travel to scheduled sports events and institutional policies require that they make up for missed material, assignments and examinations. The constant absences of athletes also genuinely tend to hurt their image as serious students. Whether a student athlete is a student first or an athlete first has long been a controversial issue in collegiate athletics. Finding a working balance is an issue that student athletes, academic advisors and coaches have to deliberately strategize on if the student athlete is to excel in both and still graduate with a decent degree.

The third external factor is the learning environment in the campus. When student needs are adequately met, a student is likely to identify with the institutions and therefore desire to play an important role within it. When there is congruence between an individual and the campus environment that student will be happier, better adjusted, and more likely to achieve personal and educational goals. Student engagement or involvement is a function of both the individual student effort and the institutional practices and policies that encourage students to participate in educationally purposeful activities. A disequilibrium and disproportionate amount of time given to one form of involvement such as athletics leaves the other areas including academics to suffer. Hence need for prudent planning at institutional level so as to facilitate student athlete success both on the field and in class.

## Conclusion

There could be specific initiatives focusing on the individual student athlete (personal/internal factors) and the external (institutional/environmental factors) that may impact student athletes' dual mission on campus. Athletics needs to be streamlined to enhance student learning. Some of the specific programs recommended include academic monitoring, personal counseling, career guidance, life skills training, peer mentoring, inculcation of study skills, intensified tutoring sessions, among others. Educational institutions should ensure that these student athletes are not entirely left to the care of the coaches but the other teachers also are in constant touch with these students so that their academic side too is well taken care of. Institutions should provide a learning environment devoid of discrimination, marginalisation and one that promotes balanced emphasis on academics and athletics with healthy student and

<sup>15</sup> J Coakley, *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*, Boston, McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2009.

faculty interaction. In educational institutions in India there is very little interaction between the coaches and the other academic teachers in the campus. Institutions should purposefully create occasions for better interaction and understanding between the coaches and other teaching faculty. The experience in Indian campuses show that the student athletes due to various reasons shy away from the other teaching faculty. But institutions should enlighten their student athletes and also the faculty about the need for constant interaction and dialogue between the two. Administrators should therefore create a learning environment that maximises student athlete involvement away from the playing field.